

Central Waterfront Plan Forum 2 Workbook

Discussion Group Summaries



Department of Planning and Development

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city
design



Seattle's Central Waterfront Plan

Discussion Group Summaries

Contents

Discussion Group Summary	p. 1
Summary of Meetings.....	p. 1
Discussion Group 1: Transportation	p. 1
Discussion Group 2: Urban Design, Public Space, Historic Preservation, Arts and Culture	p. 3
Discussion Group 3: Natural Environment and Ecology	p. 5
Discussion Group 4: Economic Development, Tourism & Trade ..	p. 6
Discussion Group 5: Neighborhood, Community, Housing, Social Services & Stewardship	p. 8
Resources Recommended by Discussion Groups	p. 9
Information Gaps Identified by Discussion Groups	p. 10



Discussion Groups

Discussion Group Summary

In September-October, 2003 the Department of Planning and Development sponsored five technical discussion groups as a second step in the Central Waterfront Planning process. The discussion groups were formed around five key aspects of Waterfront Planning:

- Transportation
- Urban Design, Public Space, Historic Preservation, Arts and Culture
- Natural Environment and Ecology
- Economic Development, Tourism and Trade
- Neighborhood, Community, Housing, Social Services and Stewardship

The goal of these discussion group meetings was to develop technical background information that will inform the Central Waterfront planning process. The discussion groups brought together 15-20 experts in each of these areas and averaged 75-80% professionals in private practice and community representatives who volunteered their time and 20-25% City planning staff. Each of the discussion groups were given the following tasks to accomplish:

- Develop key issues or priorities for the waterfront plan.
- Identify existing resources (documents or people) that we should know about.
- Identify information gaps – what information do we still need to develop?
- Refine the draft “Principles” (and givens) that were prepared for Waterfront Forum #1 in June, 2003

The discussion groups were held prior to the second Central Waterfront Forum on November 7, 2003. Each discussion group raised many issues, ideas as well as questions for Central Waterfront Planning. The outcomes of the discussion groups will be presented and discussed at the November 7 Forum as well as in the following is a written summary.

Summary of Meetings

Discussion Group 1: Transportation

The Transportation Discussion Group met three times between September 9 and October 7. The following seven themes emerged during the discussions.

1. East-West Access

Improving east-west connections between the downtown uplands and the Waterfront should be a priority. Existing connections between the uplands and the Waterfront are not always clear and amenable. Significant east-west connections include Union Street, Washington Street, Pike Street, Pine Street, University Street, Yesler Way, Jefferson Street, Seneca Street, Spring Street, Madison Street and Broad Street. Pedestrian overpasses are one means for improving east-west connections. East-west connections could also be improved through transportation devices such as the cable car, funicular, escalator and elevator.

2. Separation of Modes

Many different modes of transportation occupy the Waterfront and there are conflicts between the different modes. Several questions were raised about the separation of transportation modes: Is there a need to clarify the space and route for each mode of transportation? Is it possible to prioritize the different modes of transportation? Is it possible to take some modes of transportation elsewhere away from the waterfront? It was suggested that conflicts between transportation uses may be eliminated by creating use-specific corridors to separate transportation modes. This separation would allow the scale and design details of each transportation system to fit the mode.

3. Waterfront as Destination

The Central Waterfront is a destination that supports a diversity of uses. The Waterfront is not one thing – there are and can be different zones of activity. Look at treating the waterfront as a collection of zones that could be treated differently. The relationship between density, land use, and transportation is critical. These must all support each other in creating a destination.

Key destinations on the Waterfront include Colman Dock, the Aquarium, Pier 66 and the Market. To make the Waterfront more of a ‘destination’ we need to consider how to balance place and traffic. We appear to have conflicting goals of making the Waterfront into more of a destination and improving the waterfront as transportation corridor. We should prioritize transportation solutions that help the waterfront become more of a destination. We also need a better understanding of ‘local’ versus ‘through’ traffic. Designing for the single occupancy vehicle (SOV) through-traffic does not support the creation of a destination and should be less of a priority. In planning for transportation on the waterfront, we should ask: ‘what do we want to happen there?’ rather than ‘what don’t we want?’

We need to agree on terms and clarify whether or not placing Highway 99 in a tunnel still means that the Central Waterfront functions as a transportation corridor. Is it a transportation corridor if the transportation is underground? The character of Alaskan Way will depend on the approach we take to replacing the Viaduct. We need to place less emphasis on the details of viaduct design and focus more on what kind of structure we want on the waterfront. Alternatives for viaduct replacement need to be clearly delineated.

4. Public Access

Improving public access should be a part of the Central Waterfront’s transportation network. Incorporate into transportation improvements opportunities for the public to access the water and the waterfront.

5. Utilities

The Central Waterfront is not only a destination and transportation corridor but also a major utilities corridor. We need to incorporate the Waterfront’s role as a major underground utility corridor into planning.

6. Economics

We need to look closer at what freight and industry means for the city and regional economy and what do we want to do about these in the future. The economic value of industries or uses that are served by transportation improvements needs to be given more weight in relation to other sectors of the economy. The city and regional economy needs to be reconciled with transportation investment. How do we prioritize our resources? Freight mobility is an important part of the economics of industry. There is a great need to develop a broader understanding of what freight mobility consists of. Trucks (delivery and short/long haul) and rail are the two important land-side components of overall freight mobility.

7. Public Transit

The waterfront needs efficient and pleasant transit options. Bus and other transit service on the waterfront need to be improved. The waterfront needs greater connectivity and linkages between transit modes. The multi-modal character of the waterfront should be high on the list of priorities. Important parts of the multi-modal transit system that need improvement and increase in service are the Waterfront Trolley (including track design and placement) and ferry service (the San Francisco Bay Area could be a model). Overall, bicycles and transit need more space to be effective on the Central Waterfront. Keys to successful multi-modal transit include improving the proximity of modes to each other, coordinating transit schedules, establishing a common fare structure and providing adequate information. A good example of the integration of transit modes is the New York City ferry & bus systems. On the other hand are there situations where we should separate transit uses? How much intensity of transit operations do we want on the Waterfront? What are the costs and benefits of the various modes on the Waterfront?

Discussion Group 2:

Urban Design, Public Space, Historic Preservation, Arts and Culture

The Urban Design, Public Spaces, Historic Preservation, Arts and Culture Discussion Group met three times between September 10 and 24. The following nine themes emerged during the discussions.

1. Heterogeneity

The Central Waterfront has the potential to support a variety of activities, uses and people. Planning for the Central Waterfront should encourage this kind of heterogeneity. The Waterfront should be a place that is used year round. How should the Central Waterfront accommodate diverse uses including residential, public space and water-related activities?

2. Authenticity

Uses and activities that draw locals will also appeal to tourists (e.g., the Pike Place Market). There was much discussion on how to preserve “authenticity” of the Waterfront. Authenticity of place, and not just use, is important to consider. It is difficult to define what authenticity is in terms of place. We need to think in terms of layers of authenticity – is there only one time period that is authentic or is authenticity built up over time? There were differing opinions on how we should address authenticity. On the one hand, some thought that we should not replace what is currently authentic on the waterfront. On the other hand, authentic uses are no longer present and we should focus on strengthening contemporary uses. Something new can still be authentic. There are also “inauthentic” things that draw people and activity to a place. It was also suggested that we think in terms of integrity of place rather than focusing on authenticity.

Authenticity is related to how the waterfront serves residents as well as tourists. We need to consider the balance between local services and tourist oriented attractions. How “touristy” should the waterfront be? Tourists want to see what is unique and local about a city. A destination that serves residents well is also attractive to tourists. The Pike Place Market is an example of a place that has been successful at serving both residents and tourists.

Authenticity is also contingent on how a place responds to its natural environment. Some of the unique natural aspects of Seattle’s waterfront include exposure to varied weather conditions, the sharp drop in depth of Elliott Bay, the variation between high and low tides (11-13 ft) and the views of the Olympic Mountains to the west.

3. Connection with Place

Our connection to place is a deep and fundamental part of human experience. How to we create an “ecosystem of activity,” i.e., use activity to create a sense of connection of the place and integrity of experience.

The Central Waterfront is unique as a flat continuous narrow space running north-south. However, the waterfront is not monolithic. There is much variation in the landscape from one end to the other. How much more varied or continuous should the waterfront be? The variation in the Waterfront landscape can accommodate a variety of interrelated activities and uses.

4. Sparkle

Vitality, funkiness and spontaneity may be encouraged by making space for activities that are not planned or homogenous. Avoid making the Waterfront into a theme park or a copy of successful, popular places in other cities. We need to consider carefully what will make Seattle’s waterfront unique. Art in public places is part of the sparkle of the Waterfront. The sparkle of art may be enhanced by creating “frames” where art can happen rather than placing specific pieces in locations.

5. Access

Access is sensory, psychological and visual. Access is about making places where we can physically touch the water, creating better pedestrian and vehicle access to the waterfront and optimizing views of the water. Improving public access to the Waterfront is a matter of creating a feeling of “porosity” and bringing downtown land uses to the waterfront. Making connections to bring people to the waterfront is an important challenge for Central Waterfront Planning. Connections to adjacent neighborhoods tend to be idiosyncratic rather than homogenous. The steep grade also presents some challenges to upland-waterfront connections. Some possibilities for improving connections down to the waterfront from upland neighborhoods include skybridges, concentrated connections and gentle promenades. Central Waterfront Planning will need to determine where the key connectors are located along the Waterfront and how to improve them.

The group also discussed whether or not there should be opportunities for people to make contact with the water. How can this be achieved given the nature of tides, water quality, depth and other constraints?

6. Working Waterfront

What does is a “working waterfront” for 21st century Seattle? Historically, the working waterfront was industrial with water-dependent uses and other appropriate working activities. Our goal should be to envision the “working waterfront” as a “waterfront that works.”

7. Human Scale

Balance the activities and scale that serve the Waterfront as a destination, with the activities and scale that serve the waterfront as a transportation corridor. The Central Waterfront should be an urban destination where people want to spend time. The Waterfront should primarily a destination and not just a corridor for through-traffic. How do we separate through-traffic in order to support the waterfront as a destination?

8. Preservation of the Piers

There was also concern about preserving the existing piers. The piers are important as an embodiment of the Waterfront’s history and a resource of national value. The piers should be maintained rather than preserved. However, we should be mindful that there are economic costs for maintaining the historic piers.

9. Implementation/Development

Planning for Central Waterfront should include a look at precedents for waterfront redevelopment from other cities. These should include examples of what not to do. We will need to balance innovative concepts with economic, physical and other realities. Another consideration is phasing. Will it be preferable to pursue incremental development over the long term rather than a large project in a shorter time frame? A large amount of the Central Waterfront land is publicly owned. Who should control development of the Central Waterfront? Should a Public Development Authority (PDA) be established? It is important that we figure out how to get all of the entities that control the waterfront to work together.

We will need to determine how much density and intensity of development can be accommodated on the Waterfront. What is the balance between density and open space? We need to think three dimensionally about development along the Central Waterfront.

Discussion Group 3: Natural Environment and Ecology

The Natural Environment and Ecology Discussion Group met three times between September 29 and October 13. The following three themes emerged during the discussions.

1. Ecosystem Health and the Waterfront

The Waterfront should be “edible” i.e., “fishable,” and “swim-able.” It is important to manage the whole of the waterfront and not just specific discharges and other hot spots. We need to think in terms of continuity between the waterfront and upland areas in enhancing the habitat. Bathymetry as well as elevation plays a role influences the functioning of ecosystem. There is a great need for habitat to support natural processes in Elliott Bay. Types of habitat and their locations will need to be determined in the planning process.

2. Shoreline Habitat Restoration-Rehabilitation

It is not possible to restore the Waterfront ecology and landscape to the pre-development condition. It is important, however, to increase habitat for marine life and improve water quality. There is currently a lack of shallow water habitat along the seawall. This is partially due to the bathymetry of Elliott Bay and the

There is some level of uncertainty related to habitat restoration. We need to assess risk of whether or not restored habitat will improve salmon population before investing in it. There may be other factors diminishing marine populations that habitat restoration cannot address. The food source for juvenile salmon is also an important influence on the health of salmon population. Overall, we should focus on creating potential for diversity rather than homogenization of the substrate. Ecological design for seawall and pier structures can increase the diversity of habitats for marine life. The existing seawall is a straight, vertical structure in deep water with little opportunity for habitat. Shelves at varying depths, light, native vegetation and modulation of the seawall are elements that could enhance habitat. The shape of the seawall is contingent on whether or not it will be part of a tunnel structure.

Soils contamination and stability are significant issues for the Central Waterfront. The submerged soil along Elliott Bay is largely fill and sediment. Contamination and re-contamination of sediments occurs when construction and repair work is done along the waterfront. We can identify some opportunities and locations for sediment clean-up in the Central Waterfront. Sediment clean-up should be linked with the projects that are underway. We need to look at the results of monitoring

programs for capping projects so that we can determine what the best approach is for capping sediments. We need to look at the long-term track record for capping to see if the results are beneficial. This is important to know before we proceed with further capping projects. There is also the potential for recontamination of sites where soils have been capped.

3. Impacts on Environmental Quality

Vehicular traffic along the Waterfront has impacts on both air and water quality. Vapors and particulates eventually find their way into the water. Vehicular exhaust is likely to be greater for highway passing through Waterfront than for a local street serving the Waterfront as a destination. On the other hand, stop and go traffic and congestion can produce significant. Tour buses and taxi cabs also impact air quality on the Waterfront especially around the cruise ship terminal. Placing through traffic in tunnels may help since exhaust can be controlled and scrubbed through vents.

Transportation facilities on the waterfront such as the cruise ship terminal and ferry terminal have impacts on the natural environment and aesthetic quality. Should the economic benefits of these facilities outweigh the environmental costs? Terminal structures have impacts on view corridors and pedestrian access to the water. We should seek holistic, environmentally oriented solutions to issues related to cruise ship and ferry docking.

Runoff is a significant problem for water quality in Elliott Bay. Structures over water, especially parking lots such as the holding area at Colman Dock, can have significant impacts on water quality. Oil, particulates and other pollutants can wash into the water below during with rain. Over-water structures and impervious surfaces should be minimized as much as possible along Elliott Bay. Runoff from streets along the waterfront has impacts on water quality. New biofiltration technologies can help with controlling runoff into Elliott Bay. Reduce quantity and improve quality of run-off going into Elliott Bay.

Creosote coated and arsenic treated timber pilings pose a toxicity problem along the Waterfront. These chemicals elevate pH levels in the water. Plastics, concrete and coated steel are possible alternatives for pier pilings but their effects on water quality will need to be assessed.

The effects of Combined Sewer Outflows on water quality need to be assessed. CSOs discharge fresh water and affect the salinity. These discharges may be detrimental in some locations and beneficial in others. It was suggested that CSOs should be reduced or even eliminated. The quantity of stormwater discharge could be reduced through various water harvesting technologies and the quality improved through biofiltration.

Discussion Group 4: Economic Development, Tourism & Trade

The Economic Development, Tourism and Trade Discussion Group met two times between October 1 and 15. The following four themes emerged during the discussions.

1. The Long Term

Replacement of the Alaskan Way Viaduct and redevelopment of the Central Waterfront are long term projects. Within the long term, however, the Waterfront is experiencing continuous change in terms of uses. Central Waterfront planning needs to be for the long term but with flexibility to address change. It is important to think carefully about the costs of displacing water-dependent uses with non-water-dependent uses. It is very difficult to regain water-dependent uses once they have been displaced.

2. Mobility

Maintaining multi-modal mobility along the waterfront is a significant issue and a key to some funding for Central Waterfront transportation improvements. The Central Waterfront has the potential to become an inter-modal transportation hub for the Puget Sound region with ferries, cruise ships, buses and more. We need to think broadly in terms of the Waterfront an inter-urban and intra-urban hub accommodating different transportation modes along the waterfront – ferries, pedestrian, transit, etc.

Expanding the transit network and increasing alternative transit modes will enhance the usability of the Central Waterfront. Maintaining access to waterfront businesses is also important. Demand for transit services by employees, as well as visitors and residents, is increasing on the Central Waterfront. East-west connections between the waterfront and the upland areas of the Center City should be improved for pedestrians, transit and freight.

We also need to maintain mobility for transportation of goods between the industrial areas to the north and the south. The existing viaduct and rail lines are important means for moving freight between the Duwamish and BINMIC industrial areas and beyond. Rail traffic through the Central Waterfront is likely to increase in the future. One possibility for improving mobility is to incorporate intermodal (road and rail) connections on the Central Waterfront where hubs already exist for ferries, cruise ships, etc. Grade separations between street and rail is another option.

3. Business/Use

The Central Waterfront supports a wide range of activities. It is not a monolithic waterfront but an area with diverse neighborhoods, uses and economic return. It is important to maintain the current maritime, water-dependent uses - ferries, port operations - and promote businesses that support economic development on the waterfront, pay higher wages and generate export revenue for the city.

Increasing the number of pedestrians in certain areas on the Central Waterfront is desirable. We need to look at where it is desirable to increase pedestrian activity and where it is not. Ways to increase pedestrian activity include encouraging businesses that attract pedestrians to locate on the Waterfront and improving public access to the area. Recognizing and enhancing the diversity of activity in different zones of the waterfront - south, central and north – should be integral to planning and economic development of the Central Waterfront.

4. Development

Authenticity is difficult to define for the Central Waterfront. A big challenge for planning will be how to create an environment where people mix with the “real work” of the Central Waterfront while avoiding homogenized theme park reenactment of historic conditions. Another challenge of authenticity for planning is to find the right balance between maintaining control or regulation of activity and encouraging spontaneity. How the historic architecture and physical environment is treated will significantly influence the feeling of authenticity. Planning the Central Waterfront for the local community instead of tourists will also enhance authenticity. Establish mechanisms for managing waterfront development

The future development of Terminal 46 is a huge issue for Central Waterfront planning. There is a question as to whether or not the entire site needs to be dedicated to container terminal use in the future. Any planning for change in uses will need to have a broad community-based conversation. Reducing the amount of land devoted to container shipping is possible. Other ports, especially in Asia, are able to efficiently accommodate high volumes of container activity in relatively small land area.

Housing development is one of the emerging uses along the Central Waterfront. Housing, tourism, container operations, ferries, cruise ships and other uses make the Waterfront a dynamic place. Different uses can mutually support each other but there is still the potential for conflict, however. Planning will need to accommodate the current mix and anticipate the future mix of activities on the Waterfront.

Discussion Group 5: Neighborhood, Community, Housing, Social Services & Stewardship

The Neighborhood, Community, Housing, Social Services & Stewardship Discussion Group met two times between September 9 and October 14. The following two themes emerged during the discussions.

1. Waterfront as Neighborhood

The Central Waterfront is a regional amenity and a diverse neighborhood that accommodates residential, commercial and tourist uses. However, at present, there is a lack of “neighborhood feeling” on the Waterfront. The Central Waterfront is often perceived to be a separate place apart from the rest of the Center City. There is a tension between waterfront’s role as a thoroughfare and as a destination. The Waterfront accommodates two kinds of users: 1) those who pass through it on the way other destinations and 2) those who go to the Waterfront because it is a destination. Business and Industrial areas to the north and south depend on the transportation corridor through the Central Waterfront. We will need creative transportation solutions to balance the competing needs of the corridor and the destination.

There is need for more public open space and more indoor gathering places in the Center City neighborhoods that are expected to accommodate more residents, workers and visitors, in the future. The Waterfront has the potential to be a significant open space resource for these neighborhoods. The Waterfront should accommodate a healthy mix of uses. Mixed uses can help give the Central Waterfront more of a neighborhood feel. Is the current zoning appropriate for the uses that are desired on the waterfront? There is also the need to find a balance between water dependant uses and other uses. Water dependent uses such as ferries, cruise ships and container transport compete with uses such as open space and housing. Public toilets, comfort stations, information resources and wayfinding are other amenities that could enhance the neighborhood feel of the Central Waterfront.

2. Connectivity to Adjacent Neighborhoods.

East-West connections between the Waterfront and the upland neighborhoods are important. There is a challenge to making the Waterfront inviting; creating a sense of public ownership. Access to the waterfront is a key to preventing stagnation and underutilization of the neighborhood. Currently, the Central Waterfront feels like it is disconnected from the upland neighborhoods. Much of the disconnection is related to the Viaduct acting as a visual, auditory and physical barrier. The pedestrian connections themselves are often obscured, incomplete or blocked. The walk to the Waterfront from the neighborhoods is often a roundabout and uncertain path. The current dichotomy of ownership between public and private also creates a barrier to access. Better wayfinding could also help with improving connections between the Waterfront and neighborhoods. The Waterfront should be accessible to people of all ages and abilities. Critical connections include Thomas Street, Broad Street & Alaskan Way, Green Streets such as Vine Street, the area around the Battery Street tunnel and Pioneer Square streets such as Washington and Jackson Streets.

Resources Recommended by Discussion Groups

[North Waterfront Transportation Summaries](#) (2001)

[DWWSysytems/Alaskan Way Viaduct Alternatives Project Summary](#) (2002)

[Combined Sewer Outflow \(CSO\) Reduction Plan Amendment](#) (2001)

[Downtown Design Forum](#) (1994)

[Mayor's Recommended Harborfront Public Improvement Plan](#) (1987)

[North Waterfront Access Plan](#) (2001)

[City's Waterfront Planning Process: Proposed Seattle Aquarium Priorities](#) (2003)

[Development of an Aquatic Management Plan for Elliott Bay and the Duwamish Estuary: A Study](#) (1993)

[Chapter 173-26 WAC – State Master program Approval/Amendment Procedures](#)

[Shoreline Management Act of 1971 – RCW 90.58](#)

[Alaskan Way Viaduct: Report of the Structural Sufficiency Review Committee](#) (2001)

[Draft Technical Memorandum: Seattle Shoreline Habitat Restoration Opportunities](#) (April 24, 2003)

[Central Bay Habitat Goals](#) (2003)

Information Gaps Identified by Discussion Groups

- Information about where utilities run, space requirements, access and maintenance requirements.
- Port of Seattle revenue/industry information: Frequency, projections, size of ships.
- Study of revenues generated by the different industries that occupy and use the waterfront?
- Study that shows numbers of users who move through the central waterfront area and use it as a through corridor versus those who use it as a destination.
- Assessment of the potential power/limitations of the waterfront plan (what land is publicly owned?)
- Assessment of the impact of the viaduct replacement project on waterfront businesses.
- Clarification on the limits set by the Shoreline Management Act.
- Analysis of existing East-West connections.
- Map of outfalls and stormwater basins.
- Data on toxics in the watershed, ambient water quality in Elliott Bay. Sampling study on the waterfront.
- Life cycle analysis for plastics, steel and other materials and their impact on water.
- Information, data, studies of tunnel air filtering/cleaning to address air pollution.
- Assessment of economic benefits from the cruise ship industry.
- Study of the environmental tradeoffs/environmental affects caused by the cruise ship industry.
- What future regulations will be required for salmon along the waterfront?
- Soil conditions at Terminal 46.
- Statistics on the industrial use along the north-south corridor including vehicle numbers and cargo volumes.
- A pedestrian study of the waterfront area including a qualitative analysis of all east-west streets, the numbers of pedestrian users along different routes and numbers of pedestrians and level of service information for intersections.
- Single-occupancy vehicle studies that look at viaduct users and Alaskan Way users.
- Review of existing policies in place on the waterfront (FAR, zoning, etc.).